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ABSTRACT

Views were surveyed of 24 academics from the Faculties of Arts and Sciences of the University of New South Wales, Australia, on the ways in which their professional lives were being affected by the current recession in higher education. The comments cluster around seven topics: teaching, students, research, colleagues, career prospects, the university, and the quality of academic life. A notable finding from the interviews is what they reveal about the relationship between the perceived realities of university life and the preferred working environment of academics. Most people derived considerable satisfaction from teaching yet many indicated that they felt that this was undervalued by the institution. Many respondents attached significance to social relationships and a sense of community but felt that their daily experience of these was less than optimal. There was a feeling that institutional arrangements largely failed to recognize their need to participate more fully in decision-making and policy formation. The broader significance and worth of their scholarly and teaching activities were perceived as being increasingly undervalued by the community at large. Growing and competing demands on their time were seen to be making it increasingly difficult to give adequate attention to the various elements in their professional role. The findings suggest a widening gap between academic ideals and the realities of daily experience that is likely to lead to frustration and a dissatisfaction that in turn will weaken morale. (SW)

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THE ACADEMIC LIFE:

UNIVERSITY TEACHERS TALK ABOUT THEIR WORK

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ABSTRACT

Twenty-four academics were interviewed in mid-1979 to seek their views on the ways in which their professional lives were being affected by the current recession in higher education. Their responses have been drawn upon to outline a picture of how this group of university teachers perceive their working environment and their own place within it. The comments cluster around seven topics: teaching, students, research, colleagues, career prospects, the University, and the quality of academic life. It is concluded that the responses suggest the existence of a widening gap between academic ideals and institutional realities and that this will undermine morale unless steps are taken to close it.

UNIVERSITY TEACHERS TALK ABOUT THEIR WORK

INTRODUCTION

The traditional attractions which the academic profession offered to scholars and teachers lay principally in the opportunities which it gave for research and engagement in reflective thought. In return for a commitment to instruct students during part of the year it offered a modest income and the time and freedom to follow intellectual pursuits. Veblen (1954), writing in 1918, described the members of the profession as constituting:

> A vicarious leisure class... they have entered on the academic career to find time, place, facilities and a congenial environment for the pursuit of knowledge, and under pressure they presently settle down to a round of perfunctory labour by means of which to simulate the life of a gentleman.

More recently, Halsey and Trow (1971) have also stressed the favourable conditions attaching to the academic life.

> There is freedom in the sense of personal autonomy of an order to be found rarely, if at all, in other occupational groups. These conditions permit the essential elements of what is considered a "gentlemanly" way of life. They also make professionalism possible in that, with assured income, both the self-respect of the university teacher and the pressure on him to work beyond the unexacting minimum of his formal duties derive in large measure from his reputation among his colleagues.

How do academics see themselves in the changed circumstances of the 1980s? In view of the paucity of studies of the academic profession the answer to this question has considerable intrinsic interest, but its practical import is even greater at the present time. There is every indication that the higher education system is entering a lengthy period of recession and retrenchment. This will place severe strains upon the institutions and those who work in them. If the universities are to continue to make their distinctive contribution to national life then the academic profession must adapt itself to changing circumstances without compromising its commitment to research and teaching. Those who are concerned to ensure that the profession is enabled to continue in the full exercise of its responsibilities need an understanding of how academics view their work and the ways in which this is being

affected by current circumstances. The present study is intended as a contribution to the development of that understanding.

There have been very few investigations of what Baird and Hartnett (1980) rather awkwardly term the "sociopsychological environment" of academics. In Britain there has been the recent work of Startup (1979) and the large-scale survey conducted by Halsey and Trow (1971). The latter was undertaken in the early 1960s and was largely concerned with attitudes towards the post-Robbins expansion of the university system. In Australia there exist only a very small number of published studies, such as those of Magin (1973), Saha (1975) and Genn (1980), which have been concerned with academics as a professional group. A number of investigations are currently underway or about to be reported but most of these rely upon questionnaire data which, however valuable, cannot provide the richness of detail yielded by interviews.

The data to be drawn upon here were collected in the course of an investigation of the impact of the "steady state" upon the working lives of academics. The major findings of that study have already been reported elsewhere (Powell and Shanker, 1980; Powell, 1981) and the purpose of the present paper is to explore the data obtained from one university in more detail in order to construct a detailed picture of the ways in which academics view their working environment and their own place within it.

Information was gathered from 24 staff in the Faculties of Arts and Science. The group consisted of twelve lecturers, ten senior lecturers and two associate professors. All but two of them held tenured positions. The rationale for selecting this group was that we were seeking the views of people who had been in post long enough to have had experience of pre-recession times but who could still be expected to entertain hopes of career advancement. Arts and Science disciplines were chosen because they not only constitute the traditional core of a university but are also less subject to the effects of those variations in the graduate employment situation which affect the professional faculties.

Data were collected in June/July 1979 using a structured interview which usually lasted about an hour. The interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed. All references to individuals, departments and

disciplines have been deleted. Assurances of confidentiality were given and the respondents spoke quite freely about all aspects of their work. They appeared to welcome the opportunity which the interview offered them to speak about their professional activities. In this paper we present some facets of the reality of academic life as seen from the perspective of those who were interviewed (Filstead, 1970).

In interpreting the material presented here it is important to bear in mind some of its limitations. The 24 people who were interviewed are in no sense a representative sample of Australian academics or even of staff in one university. The focus of the interviews was the perceived impact upon themselves and their colleagues of the termination of a period of rapid expansion in higher education. Respondents were invited to comment upon the negative and positive effects of what would be seen as a reduction in the resources available to the universities. This orientation of the original study may well have given a rather more negative overall tone to the responses than would have been obtained as a result of a straightforward enquiry into the experiences, values and attitudes of academics. The inclusion in the study of staff from faculties which may feel themselves to be the object of stronger institutional and community support might also have resulted in a somewhat different set of responses.

During the interviews staff were invited to comment upon the effects of the current situation upon their research, teaching, publication rate, administrative responsibilities and career prospects. They were also asked to comment upon any changes in the quality of students and of institutional life, the satisfactions derived from their work, and ways in which the university was responding to changing circumstances. In the course of the interviews no constraint was placed upon the range of topics which might be canvassed and the respondents could express their opinions and concerns quite freely. What emerges from the transcripts is a group perspective upon the realities of academic life in 1979 as seen by 24 university teachers. We have attempted to portray this perspective largely by allowing the respondents to speak for themselves. The quotations have been selected to illustrate opinions on topics which were discussed by almost everyone who was interviewed. In choosing quotations we have tried to make them representative of the views expressed by a substantial number of people, but we have also

included material which indicates individual or minority opinion.

It must be stressed that no attempt has been made to establish the accuracy of the perceptions and claims which are embodied in the responses. Our concern has been to construct an account of how this group of academics see things to be and how they view their working lives. In a concluding section we identify some major themes in the interview material and comment on their implications.

TEACHING

Academics are employed to teach and to undertake research. The demands of research on one's time are very uneven and the outcomes unpredictable, but for the great majority of academics teaching is a daily business, at least during term. Research can be neglected, even ignored, without fear of calamitous consequences, but this is not true of teaching. Failure to turn up to give one's classes is impossible to conceal and a persistent failure to do so will lead to enquiries and a call for explanations. Teaching, and its attendent contacts with students, is a central responsibility of the academic and anyone who found it unrewarding or an irritating distraction from other activities would be engaged in a career which incorporated a large element of frustration. None of the respondents claimed not to enjoy teaching and many said that it offered them important rewards and satisfactions.

> I like teaching, I enjoy teaching and I think the contact with young people is stimulating. I suppose the most enjoyable part of teaching would be supervising an honours student - just at the stage where you can get a lot of satisfaction out of working with them. That's about the pick of it, and third year classes, senior teaching, I enjoy. I also enjoy first year but it's very much a performance then - it's more like a theatrical thing and you don't have much rapport with such big numbers. But when you get to senior students, they're motivated, they're interested and they keep you up to date and I think that's what I enjoy the most. I think I enjoy that more than research and I think that's why I don't do as much of it as others because I'm intent on trying to do a good job with teaching. I think that any research I could do really wouldn't be world-shaking and the best thing I can do with my intellect is to train a few other people who will probably be a damn sight better than I am. (Science)

In talking about the nature of the satisfaction to be gained from teaching some spoke of the pleasure of seeing students gain in understanding and of working with very able students who are able to stimulate the

teacher's own thinking.

> The more intense pleasure of teaching that you can have is the really new and good thinker naturally, but the other pleasure is just seeing people understand more than they did before. (Arts)

> If I am working out some ideas about something I really like having students to talk to about it because I can discuss ideas with students. Often they do point out things, perhaps a fresh view that you haven't thought of before, or they bring up an idea which you haven't had, and I find this is very stimulating. (Arts)

One commented upon the pleasure gained from favourable student reactions to teaching:

> I always survey students at the end of the course, and when you get positive feedback that's very rewarding. I don't think there are other jobs around where you can get such positive feedback. (Science)

Some of the expressions of satisfaction, however, were qualified by remarks on aspects of teaching which provoked some anxiety or were seen as unrewarding.

> I like writing and I like the research part of my work. I enjoy teaching in seminars and tutorials. I'm not that keen on lecturing. Some days I like it, some days I don't ... There's some kind of psychic energy involved when you get up in front of a whole lot of people - it's hard work. It's not as good as tutorials where you have give and take. Sometimes I don't like lectures that much - it's a strain. (Arts)

> I find tutorials a pleasure too but marking is something I cannot stand. The first time you mark an essay it's good to see what your students can do but when you have been marking them for a few years they are so similar - the same mistakes, you know, it's boring. (Arts)

> It's good that we are so concerned about teaching though it is sometimes frustrating when we have meetings. It's frustrating for me in that there is an enormous amount of time spent on, say, the form of teaching, the structure of how we are to go about doing this or that and very little time spent on content, that is, what is it you do when you teach that course? (Arts)

One commented upon the high level of commitment to teaching on the part of his colleagues whereas another claimed the reverse.

> They (colleagues) are interested in teaching. I think everyone in the School is quite concerned to do a good job teaching and to serve the students. (Arts)

I get a lot of satisfaction out of teaching. Some of my colleagues feel that teaching is just something that they are not interested in at all and in fact are rather derogatory about it. (Science)

STUDENTS

Attitudes towards teaching and the satisfactions to be gained from it are to some extent bound up with views about the characteristics of students. Most of the comments about students were made in response to a question about the quality of new students. About half of the respondents said that they were not aware of any decline in quality in recent years. The remainder claimed that entry standards had fallen and that an increasing number of students had an inadequate commitment to academic work.

It seems to me that students are getting worse and worse all the time, and I continually keep thinking back to when I finished high school. I'm sure that when I did I was nowhere near as illiterate as a lot of the students that we come across. (Science)

In first year the standard is still abysmally low. But this is a political decision isn't it? During the sixties it became politically expedient to offer tertiary education to anybody basically who wanted it, and anybody with reasonable intelligence. But I still think there are far too many people who are not interested in being at university and are not motivated. (Science)

I notice of the students that come here there is a larger proportion than there used to be seven years ago of real duds who just can't do it. There do seem to be a large number of students coming into university who simply aren't ready for the university, are not capable of handling it and who realise this in first session, either in the exam itself or giving up the course after the exam. (Arts)

I wouldn't be averse, on the whole, to universities staying as they are and having fewer students because we have a number of students who are not really suitable for university education. I would not be dissatisfied if we had fewer students. (Arts)

Some members of the Arts Faculty were concerned about declining demand for entry to the Faculty and spoke of some of the consequences of maintaining numbers by admitting a larger number of less able students. These consequences included more remedial teaching and less contact with good students.

> But the real problem for people in Arts is going to be the feeling of stagnation - there's no change. And allied to this, of course, is the small number and inferior quality of students. So what that means is that you don't have the intellectual stimulation that we used to get. Occasionally you do, occasionally you get very good students, but on average not so good. (Arts)
>
> In first year teaching, quite significant changes because they let in people well below the selection score figure of last year. It's quite a problem in first year. A number of students are very border line and we've got to do a lot of remedial teaching. (Arts)

A few noted an increase in conservative attitudes among students and less intellectual vitality.

> ... now they are very conservative - they are not adventurous any more, and in a social science that's disastrous. Four years ago I was using text books that the students regarded as not radical enough - for the last two years those books are regarded as too radical. They have really narrowed their frame of reference - they are not adventurous intellectually any more. (Arts)
>
> I am certainly available as much as I was but I would think students seek out their teachers rather less than they did, whether that has to do with financial things I don't know. My general impression is that the campus is much quieter than it has been - there are fewer people around. (Arts)

Several cited the current difficult employment situation as an explanation for the decline in demand for entry to the Arts Faculty and another spoke strongly against re-introducing tuition fees.

> ... there is a lower market for Arts graduates. You can't really expect students who may or may not want to do Arts to put in three years of their life doing a degree which is entirely useless to them and students are very conscious of this. I don't think it's useless to them but in terms of getting jobs it's useless. (Arts)
>
> At the moment there is a threat of the university fees being reinstituted as part of government measures for saving on education. That would be very injurious indeed. It would mean that the sons and daughters of the rich would be getting university education and the other people would have a lot more difficulties going to the university. It would also cut back on mature age students who I think are very important people in the community generally who do not normally go to the university in order to be trained for anything but just as an education. (Arts)

Many would have been aware of the relationship between university funding

and enrolments and there was evidence of this being a source of some anxiety and concern.

> People were worried about student quality, student numbers and the relation of these things to finance, the cut back in the number of jobs in the Faculty. These things all seem to be very closely interrelated and given the fact that they were interrelated people worry about one and they automatically percolate through to concern about the others. (Arts)

Many of the comments about students are made from the perspective of the teacher and reflect anxieties about the implications of declining enrolments for the welfare of staff. A few of the respondents tried to see things from the students' viewpoint and expressed a concern for some of the difficulties faced by students.

> We are now doing things like running lunch time sessions for kids going for interviews. Things that we never would have dreamt about in years gone past, but now it's just an essential. It seems pointless teaching them if you don't try and give them an extra little chance of getting a job, and it's going to get worse I think. I get very distressed about that problem. (Science)

RESEARCH AND PUBLISHING

Academics are expected both to teach and to engage in research. As was pointed out earlier, the teaching function is simply taken for granted and neglect of it is likely to result in quite prompt requests for explanations, if only in response to complaints from students. The taken for granted character of the teaching role is reflected in the absence of any expression in the academic vocabulary concerned with teaching which is analogous to "publish or perish".

All academics are under an obligation to make public the results of their work but the extent of publication varies widely and is related both to the discipline concerned and to individual inclinations to pursue research. Academics may not know a great deal about the teaching activities of their colleagues but presumably they are better informed about their productivity as researchers. Most universities issue an annual list of staff publications and it is quite an easy matter to determine the output of one's colleagues.

> One generation consists of people who have been here for quite some time and whose publication output is very low. Then there

> are a middle group of people who publish steadily but not spectacularly but they may have an article a year or possibly an article every two years or something like that or it may be a maximum of two articles a year. And then there is a group you could label the 'new generation' who are all younger people who are very aware of the 'publish or perish' situation and who are publishing a tremendous amount of material. But I would think that some of that material is definitely being published for the sake of being published. (Arts)

In some fields scholarly reflection and judgment are seen as being more appropriately expressed in relation to teaching rather than in publication.

> I think there is a lot of unnecessary pious talk about research. After all in the humanities we are studying creative work, works of art and they're more important than one's opinions about them. I think the most important thing is bringing students into contact with works of art and the whole of teaching is geared to doing that. (Arts)

Another respondent pointed out that the very nature of creative and scholarly work in the humanities precluded the possibility of producing results to order.

> I think it's something that you can't be pressured into really, because provided you are working on something you can't force results to come. It's not a matter of just hurrying along or doing something faster, because in a field like literary studies or critical studies you just have to keep on reading and wait. So you can't hurry things along really. (Arts)

Another claimed that the "publish or perish" syndrome tended to result in the production of poor quality work.

> People who publish much too often ... it's often very poor. Fewer but very good things, articles in good journals, good books that are well reviewed, but far more than simply lists. I think people who do work that is in a good category do it anyway, so I don't think there has been pressure to publish more in that sense. I don't think people should sit as dumplings doing nothing, I think people would want to publish and do their own research and they get very annoyed of course when they haven't get the money or the time to do it when teaching takes up so much of their time. (Arts)

Almost all respondents acknowledged the significance of publication in relation to securing tenured appointments and promotion. Many said that the pressure to publish was now increasing because of greater competition for positions, even though they may not themselves feel subject to that pressure.

Well, if I put myself on the job market I would feel the pressure. It doesn't apply to myself personally, but in the case of a tutor wanting advancement I think the pressure to publish would be very high. (Arts)

I am aware that one needs to have publications if one wants to be promoted and I know that a lot of emphasis is put on that here, and I think that a lot more emphasis might be placed on that in the future. (Arts)

We are under a constant pressure - or I feel a fairly constant pressure - to publish. It makes it very difficult to undertake a long-term research project and sit there secure with the knowledge that you know the book will be coming out in three years time. I think that's a luxury a senior lectureship gives you, that you don't have as a lecturer. (Arts)

I would hate to have an untenured position at the moment because I would not be able to concentrate on any real work at all. The pressure to publish anything regardless of quality would be very great, everything would be rushed and you wouldn't have any sense of security or continuity. (Arts)

It's all right if you succeed but if you don't succeed then you don't get any funds, then you don't do any work and you don't publish and you don't get any graduate students. So then you have no hope of getting funds and that really must be terribly depressing for people who are caught in that sort of situation. (Science)

Oh, the pressure is about the same, it's always been very high. It's more now throughout the whole university system throughout the Western world. To get on you have got to be very, very good. There are unemployed academics who have published and are very good. You know you are competing with them. They'll take a lower salary so they can get in, so you are competing with them as well as people who are already established. (Arts)

The general view was summed up by a scientist who said: "Basically, what it boils down to is what we all know - 'publish or perish'."

There were a number of comments expressing concern that teaching might be neglected because of the demand for more publication. Doubts were also expressed about the value which was attached to teaching activities when career advancement decisions were being made.

... people always piously say, yes, we take your teaching qualifications into account, but I really don't think they do. Untenured staff because they are only going to have three or five years are going to be much more concerned with churning out their publications and doing their research. (Arts)

I think that people appointed under that system (limited tenure)

are going to be concentrating mainly on research and not teaching because the chance of getting a tenured appointment is mainly based on what research you have done. So I think that would very likely lead to a decrease in the level of teaching. (Science)

What saddens me is that there isn't sufficient emphasis put on teaching which I think would be my strength for promotion. The effort I should be putting should be on publication because I think that's the thing that really wins promotion. The impression I have is when you achieve some sort of excellence in teaching it doesn't count much. (Science)

VIEW OF COLLEAGUES

Academic work, like that of the general medical practitioner, is very much a private affair. Reflection, reading and writing are essentially solitary activities. Even the teaching of students, which would appear to be much more public in character, is rarely observed by colleagues. Most academics, however, have opinions - well-founded or not - about the professional competence of their colleagues and these often emerged during the interviews. There was a substantial number of unfavourable comments on other people but these were sometimes expressed with some degree of sympathy in that shortcomings were attributed to a lack of institutional rewards rather than to individual weaknesses.

They see that they are not going to get anywhere, so there is not much point in doing that much research any longer and there is not much point in trying to do a good job in teaching. (Science)

Oh, they don't do much else here except have coffee. They don't work, they don't really produce anything. (Arts)

People used to be in doing their research but for the last couple of years they haven't really been around. You know, they have taken their holidays and this sort of thing. Three or four years ago there were people in the place at night, apart from the research students - even an awful lot of the research students are not there at night any longer. (Science)

There is one who wants to publish. He's working now because he wants to move and I think pretty much solely because he wants to move. But he's working and I think he's working very hard these days. The rest are not publishing at all and most haven't published in years. The head of the School, I think, may be getting back at publishing but he hasn't done anything for quite a while. He confesses that he thinks maybe he's losing interest in the subject. (Arts)

> The system is there to be exploited even if it means exploiting some of your colleagues. I think that some of the people who are older certainly appear to me to be saying, well, the system is playing me for what it can get so I'll play the system for what I can get. I think if you get to be a senior lecturer and things are not going well and you have not got enough money for research, then you just say "Well blow it, I'm not going to be a senior lecturer for the rest of my life, I might as well retire". Or still stay at university, still get your salary and do as little as you can, because it is a no-win situation for those people. (Science)

Two respondents claimed that the rapid earlier expansion of the universities had led to the appointment and promotion of some staff who are not of the calibre of many of those now seeking positions.

> When the University expanded very rapidly and gave an awful number of people tenure there was a lot of deadwood including people who shouldn't really have been in a university. Those people are quite safe, just as the best people are quite safe, because they have tenure. There are a tremendous number of very talented people who a few years ago would have got jobs who are quite likely going to get no job in any university, and that is really sad. (Arts)

> I'm sure that if one's honest there are some of us in these jobs now who wouldn't be here if in fact there hadn't been the tremendous growth in the universities during the end of the 50s and during the 60s - it was the dearth of people. (Science)

One person expressed satisfaction with the fact that some of his colleagues were now obliged to engage in more teaching because of staff shortages.

> With this general cut-back in part-time teaching funds one way of saving the part-time teaching expenditure is to make some staff who haven't been doing much teaching do a little bit more teaching. Now, I think logically you would expect those people to complain a little bit more and they do, but once again they should have been doing more teaching all along. So you don't get a lot of sympathy from me on that one. (Science)

Another spoke in strong terms about what was judged to be the inadequate teaching competence of some of his colleagues.

> Their presentation is poor largely because they have never been told, nobody bothers to tell them anyway. And then you get some of them airing their views about how courses should be designed. You make some comment about junior students having to start from the concrete and work towards the abstract and they would look at you as if you were mad. (Science)

There were also, of course, other comments in praise of colleagues who continue to be dedicated to their work in the face of mounting difficulties

and frustrations.

> Assuming that you are willing to be in the same university and the same spot for the next thirty years it's fine. I don't personally think that many people teaching in the universities are as dull as that personally. Maybe it's that ours is a very lively department and has very good people. I think if they are intellectually lively they won't want to sit as dumplings for thirty years doing nothing. I think people like working, I think people like publishing. (Arts)

> I think they just like the teaching - they are happy. The School is very eager to put on new courses. I don't teach the M.A. I don't like teaching in the evening. I would object to teaching in the evening, but my colleagues are certainly very happy. Even in the vacation they are often in their office working. There is no hostility to being in the university so long as the work they are doing they enjoy. (Arts)

> I think most of my colleagues are hard workers and it's not as if we are leading an easy life or anything like that. We are leading an easy life only to the extent that we like what we do and I think we work hard at it. (Science)

> I haven't noticed any change in the department. People on the whole work pretty hard, put a fair amount of effort into their teaching and make the best of what the department has. (Science)

CAREER PROSPECTS

The rapid expansion of the higher education system during the 60s and early 70s created a large number of new academic positions, increased promotion opportunities and encouraged job mobility. That expansionary thrust has now been halted and has begun to go into reverse. The impact of this on the profession has been felt most acutely in the area of career advancement so that respondents' views of career opportunities were very much coloured by their impression of the extent to which financial support for the universities had been cut back. There were many comments upon the consequences of decreased job opportunities and mobility both for talented young people who are now unable to pursue an academic career and for the longer term vitality of teaching and research.

> If our best graduates drift off and do something else then it's not a visible social problem but it will invisibly eat away at the foundations over 20 years or so. It will mean that the graduates who should be the lecturers of 1986, or whatever, won't be there, they won't have continued their difficult professional self-preparation. That's terribly important. (Arts)

> The situation for tutors is desperate. There's no way we can

promise them jobs. I think this is one of the tragedies of the University that we are going to have an ageing academic population with no young blood coming through. Talented people are not going to get the jobs. (Arts)

Mobility is minimum now, there just aren't any jobs. We talked about this at our conference and the job situation is very, very tight indeed. There are some very talented people around with all the qualitifations in the world who are just sweating blood looking for jobs. (Arts)

It's going to create the sort of structural problems we have seen happen in the Public Service where they put staff ceilings on and you don't get young talent in. It's going to mean a population of academics who will inevitably, with whatever goodwill in the world, be out of touch with the needs of generations of students coming through. It will mean a decline for the future. (Arts)

Others commented on the absence of mobility as a threat to the quality of research and teaching and as possibly leading eventually to a sense of disillusionment and doubts about the value of academic work.

Promotional prospects have changed dramatically. They are largely non-existent except within your own institution, just going up the hierarchy. But if one thinks back to the 1960s, particularly the mid-1960s when I came here, the academic staff was quite mobile and people would move from a lecturer in one institution to be senior lecturer in another. This is one of the accepted paths of promotion, and from senior lecturer to reader or associate professor. This really just is not happening now. If you want people to remain active, you have got to keep stimulating them mentally and one of the best ways of doing this of course is to change the people they are working with, their surroundings. To appoint young people in their twenties and have them stay there until they retire is not the way to keep people active. (Science)

There will just be a stagnation, there will be no new blood, that's really bad for any department, and the same people are there all the time. I think mobility is very important in teaching, people bring in new ideas, new courses. Otherwise people just put on the same courses year after year. It isn't in their interests to put on new courses all the time, it's extra work obviously. (Arts)

... the freedom which one once had to move about in Australia from job to job and even from one country to another, that seems to have disappeared. These things haven't been with us long enough yet for any permanent effects to be felt. One fears that the atmosphere might degenerate, that we might all become rather disillusioned, that we might see ourselves simply as doing the same sort of thing year after year after year. We might come to a feeling that we have no purpose. (Arts)

Most of the views on this topic, however, related to the effects of reduced promotion opportunities. Some of these were concerned with the advancement prospects of the respondent but the majority were to do with the difficulties faced by younger colleagues.

> The most dramatic effect is that the young ones have no career prospects. It's messing them about disastrously. In some cases they've been committed to becoming academics. Again, you are not getting the sort of postgraduates you are looking for because there is no future. (Arts)

> We are not getting new staff. The lecturers also feel that they are stopped in their promotion opportunities because nobody moves. Once upon a time people moved from one university to another with ease. Nowadays everybody's scared to do anything because he considers himself lucky to have a job. (Arts)

> Oh, it's very bad, very bad, very demoralising for young people. People who have jobs are hanging on to them. When jobs become available they are either not filled or if they are filled you have enormously large fields and you are in competition. (Arts)

> I don't think anyone talks about resignation but it's only because they know they wouldn't get another job. But people obviously do get dissatisfied - it's very frustrating to want to do these things and not be able to do them. But it must be very much more frustrating for the younger members of staff I think. Especially the bright young people. (Science)

One respondent claimed that academics with Australian qualifications faced an additional hurdle in the promotion stakes.

> Talking about younger people wanting to get promotion, you are in competition with lots of people with overseas degrees, for example, and Australian universities are still very colonial in their view that an English degree is better than an Australian degree. Generally speaking, universities are more impressed by English degrees and this means that graduates of Australian universities have a very long road to hoe before they can think about getting a tenured position. (Arts)

Another spoke frankly about his own response to the situation in terms of academic gamesmanship.

> I obviously have to publish - make an effort to get stuff out. There are gambits I can employ: short communications, papers one can combine you split into two to increase the numbers. It's a game and I'm sure I can play it as well as anyone else. There's the unpleasant thing that I have to be involved in administrative duties, on committees, that sort of thing. I can see pressure to get on committees not because I'm interested in what the committee is going to do or what I can contribute to the committee but so that I can put down

on the list that I was on such and such a committee. (Science)

Another, a senior lecturer, was content with his own working conditions and was not ambitious for further promotion.

> I'm not desperately keen to get to the top. It's probably nice there but I'm happy where I am and I think Australian academics are paid such marvellously high salaries that I think that in a way I'm probably very unambitious in that respect. I am not keen to get more administrative responsibilities which people nearer the top get because I find that those things that I do in the administration are very boring and I don't really enjoy those much. (Arts)

QUALITY OF PROFESSIONAL LIFE

Academic life has many attractions but there was a quite widespread feeling among respondents that the extent of its attractiveness had recently been, or would soon be, diminished. This was attributed partly to such factors as inadequate public support and the threat of declining enrolments. Any perceived falling away in the support or demand for one's work is likely to have an impact upon morale and thus upon commitment and productivity. Several respondents felt that the community was now less convinced of the value of what universities have to offer.

> Mainly one feels that one is being given less and less value in the community at large, so that the community places less importance on the work of universities. (Science)

> I'm not at all convinced that the kind of activities, the kind of research we do, even the courses we teach, are really seen by the society as valuable. (Science)

> There is also the fact that higher education has lost its appeal, it's lost some of the appeal which it had, say, in the sixties. People are wondering about the value of all these universities and colleges of advanced education, what causes they serve, are they forming people who will be needed to cope with Australia's situation in the 80s and 90s. (Arts)

Some saw the lack of job mobility as reducing the attractiveness of an academic career.

> I think you will find that a lot of people will begin to wonder about the old feeling that the university academic's job is a job of great prestige and a very worthwhile job and one to be fought for and hung on to at all costs. I think that idea will fade slightly and one of the reasons it will fade is a paradoxical reason, that as jobs get harder to get as people

> become more immobilised they will think, well O.K., I can have the job but the price I have to pay is to stay here for the rest of my life. And I suppose the decline in the availability of sabbaticals will encourage that too. So, oddly enough, as university jobs get harder to get some people, because of their temperament, will feel, oh bugger it, and do something else, just for the sheer sake of mobility, being able to move around. (Arts)

Others felt that those who were attracted by opportunities to engage in research would be likely to find universities less congenial workplaces than they were formerly.

> The academic life used to be, I think, a lot more attractive than it is now. There appears to be more work loaded on to people now and fewer privileges, such as sabbatical leave being diminished drastically. In my field it's very rare these days to get a permanent position, and all of this tends to influence people away from academia. The life style doesn't have the appeal that it used to have. The big thing with academia I think was being able to do research, there's a creative element in that and with financial cut-backs peop.. are hamstrung in trying to develop their ideas so they lose their incentive to do it. (Science)

> Time to discuss academic matters rather than administration has gone down a bit because we are all running around a bit more - certainly I am - but I think we are always optimistic that things will get better. Now we have got quite a good crew of people here and eventually things will really click, but I know that people who have come in from museums or the CSIRO get quite a big shock because they were not expecting university life to be such a strain. They find that they just don't have the time for research, or they find there is too much competition for funds, and it is in fact worrying to some extent. (Science)

The great majority of comments on this topic came from members of the Faculty of Arts. It seems clear both from the nature of what was said and the language in which it was expressed that many of the staff in that faculty feel a degree of anxiety and threat with regard to their future. This largely stems from a fear of the consequences of a perceived decline in the number and quality of students and was neatly summed up by the staff member who said: "We might come to have a feeling that we have no purpose".

> I think what will happen is that we will reach a sort of plateau and the numbers of students won't go down very dramatically afterwards but gradually the Arts Faculty will become demoralised because you will get a consistent situation where you don't really have very good students or a sufficient number of them.

> If you have a lot of people coming in first year and you know that a certain percentage of them are going to fail then what are you doing teaching? It's a very demoralising sort of task I think. (Arts)

> ... a certain degree of anxiety in terms of selling oneself and the courses one teaches and the awareness that if one can't attract students then at some point the axe may fall. Secondly, an anxiety all around that the good old days have gone, that things like promotion and tenure just aren't happening and are not going to happen the way they used to. (Arts)

> I think two things are happening in the Faculty of Arts. The first thing is that there is a general demoralisation because Arts is losing its place as a sort of cultural leader. The best students are not doing Arts, they are going elsewhere or doing professional courses and this will have very strong effects on Arts. So there is a certain amount of demoralisation. (Arts)

There was a widespread appreciation of the likelihood that if student numbers decline then some staff positions will be under threat.

> That has a very big implication because if you don't have students they can start laying people off, start laying the tutors off, the non-tenured staff. The tenured staff like myself are in the safest position but it does affect us very much because the tutors are feeling the pinch. (Arts)

> I suppose the fear is that if our Faculty were to dwindle away, if you take the thing to its natural conclusion, the situation could arise where many of us would find ourselves without jobs and at a time when you are so old it's difficult to think of doing anything else. (Arts)

Most recognised that their anxieties arose mainly from anticipated developments rather than present realities, but these imaginings were no less damaging to morale.

> We recognise the crunch on tutors and that's the real one, that's about the most physical one we have got. Then there is the business that everyone is worried because no-one seems to know what's coming but everyone thinks that we haven't seen the worst. Everyone is concerned that we are really going to feel the crunch, that we haven't yet felt it. But still it's a fact that everybody worries. (Arts)

> Oh yes, we have a lot of staff meetings. They were thinking of being militant some time ago, but that dropped. There was a little clique simply saying we aren't going to teach any students or we don't have to do this or that but the majority was against that. People are just very uneasy, they just don't know what is going to happen. (Arts)

> I think in most lecturers, in general, there have been some subtle changes in attitudes to work. I mean the work is not as attractive. The future is very uncertain. We don't know whether we are going to have students. We don't know if we'll have good students. Every year seems to be no growth or cuts. If they keep going on I sometimes feel that a lot of the brighter students may not come to the university any more. I don't know what the long term future is and even there's talk about the university wanting to terminate our positions. They could get by with paying us one year's salary. I heard people talking about that during lunch time. If this crisis goes on for five or ten years, from being an attractive place to work it may not be. So there is that long term anxiety gnawing away. I think people are possibly a bit less idealistic about their job, more pragmatic, just get what they can out of it. (Arts)

Some staff appeared to accept the situation with a remarkable degree of fatalism, hopeful that things might right themselves without any intervention on their own part.

> I am full of gloom and so on .... But I don't know, I take it day by day. I have a gloomy feeling but I am not responding in a positive way. I am not packing my bags and planning to depart or anything. (Arts)

QUALITY OF INSTITUTIONAL LIFE

How this is viewed depends upon a number of factors such as individual preferences, characteristics of colleagues, size and administrative style of the institution, and the extent of participation in decision-making. Many respondents gave the impression that they were not satisfied with the social aspects of their contact with colleagues and comparisons with experiences elsewhere often led to unfavourable judgments on their own university.

> I have found that this university is very compartmentalised and divided up. There is, I find, very little socialising. For example, on the same floor as us there is another School and I have been here four years and I met somebody at a conference last May on the same floor whom I had never met, never seen before, and we got chatty and pally and, you know, we must see each other. It's been a year, May 1978, and apart from just seeing him outside the building I have never seen him or visited him on the same floor. (Arts)

> The university hasn't really been functioning as a university for so many years, it's just going to be more and more unlike a university and I think that's rather a sad thing. You would like to have the situation where most people lived on campus.

It's essentially nine to five and the kids here don't really get to see what a real university ought to be about. (Science)

It's my impression that this university is socially rather fragmented. I worked in Melbourne for five years and Melbourne had a much better social cohesiveness than this university and I think this is not simply in the Arts Faculty but in the university generally and I would say it's a result of policy decisions made early in the university's life. It's not going to be the kind of university where you have a central meeting place, and so on, for staff. (Arts)

Well, I looked around shortly after I got here and I spent over a year actually looking for some kind of campus life. It's considerably different here from the U.S. where most people live on campus and there is a real university life. You can just go out in the evening to a university cafe or a bar and meet people and you talk to people, but there is none of that here. So I have given up. I don't do that anymore and I don't try. (Arts)

We don't get together outside the campus at all. We are a very non-fraternal School. I have friends in the department and I see them outside, but not many. Most of us come in all the time and we all see each other at School meetings every two weeks but there is no getting together outside the School. (Arts)

I've never really spent a lot of time with my colleagues. I spend some time socially, attending functions and things like that, some I meet socially. Sometimes there's 15 to 20 people sitting around having lunch but it gets too much to be a political discussion. I don't have much time: I often do things during lunch time. I like to have a separation from life at home. (Arts)

There were a number of comments which reflected dissatisfaction with the administrative style of the institution. These typically incorporated references to "them" and "us", revealing a sense of not being informed about what was going on and not being involved in decision-making.

I feel that those who make the most important decisions don't have any real close acquaintanceship with the real life and job of the university. They are hard-headed businessmen really aren't they? You know, totting up the figures and seeing what's the cheapest way to do this. That's how it seems, whether it's true or not, but that's how it appears. And that's demoralising when you think that people like that are making the decisions and it's a worry. Basically the effects have been very bad and demoralising. (Arts)

I think it is impossible to tell what they are doing, because we don't get told. We don't really know what the university is doing, we don't really know why the university has decided the study leave programme to be that way, and it seems to me

if it's a reasonable approach why not tell us? I think we have a right to know those sort of things - the administration ought to work for the whole university and not just, as it appears, for itself. (Science)

I think there has to be a lot more consultation and explaining things. It seems to me within our School when we are in a difficult situation we have to try and arrive at cooperation and consensus and I think that there is some feeling about that. I think that because we are in a threatened situation, more than others, I think that people above us need to also do that. (Arts)

There is just no discussion of these fairly important policy areas outside the administrators, people like the Deans and so forth, but very frequently they won't report back. (Science)

It has typically been a fairly bureaucratic place and it's probably going to put even more bureaucratic controls around the place. They have tended in the past to take the decisions irrespective of what the university thinks. It's been for purely administrative reasons, and they are going to continue on even more in that vein. (Science)

... many of those involved at the top are already outside of the teaching area and have very little contact with students as people to teach. They are in many ways a breed apart, the administrative group are a breed apart which is interested only in maintaining its own interests. (Arts)

DISCUSSION

The interview material gathered from the 24 staff members with whom we spoke is extremely rich and varied but it is possible to discern three themes which were touched upon in almost every case.

1. Morale - There is considerable evidence of an actual or impending decline in staff morale. Many people feel insecure and anxious about the future, they see their career prospects as being constricted and perquisites such as study leave being eroded. There is a sense that the work of the universities is not much valued by the community at large. Many staff feel that teaching is less rewarding because there are fewer students with a real interest in intellectual work. All of these factors combine to make the academic life appear less attractive than it was formerly.

The nature of academic life is such that a high level of morale is probably essential if the quality of teaching and research is to be maintained. Unless staff have a strong commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and a deep engagement in the task of teaching then these activities face the risk of being neglected. Teaching loads can be required to be carried

but enthusiasm and dedication cannot be commanded by administrative fiat. Research productivity, at least for tenured staff, depends almost entirely upon individual commitment and informal pressure from peers. Apart from the evidence of publication it is not easy to determine the extent to which an academic is involved in scholarly and research activities: a great deal has to be taken on trust.

One of the prime attractions of the academic life is the freedom which it offers to pursue one's interests with a minimum of institutional demands upon one's time. The responsible exercise of this freedom requires both a commitment to the value of intellectual work and a continuing engagement in it regardless of the existence of exterior incentives. It helps, of course, to feel that what one does is valued by others and universities have traditionally provided a secure setting in which scholars can pursue their interests in a conducive atmosphere. If the feeling were to grow that this atmosphere was becoming less congenial then academic morale would lose one of its major sources of support.

> ... by the very nature of academic life it's supposed to have a great deal of freedom so that we can think great thoughts and advance human knowledge. If you are going to start getting into clock watching activity and time cards then it's destroyed. The only activity that can be monitored to that extent is of course the teaching and administrative side - no one can work out whether you are thinking properly. (Science)

The significance of individual commitment was very clearly expressed by one of the respondents:

> I think just because the money supply is tighter it surely mustn't affect your interest in work. Surely your interest in your work can't be related wholly and solely to the money supply - that's ridiculous. I'm just as interested in what I am doing as I was before. (Science)

Members of the Arts Faculty appear to be particularly vulnerable to anxieties about the future and the impact of a perceived lack of public confidence in the value of what they are doing. The feeling of insecurity is exacerbated by fears of declining enrolments, the difficult employment market for some graduates, and current talk about accountability and the justification of humanistic studies.

If the morale of the profession suffers a serious decline then this will almost certainly have the effect of undermining the quality of teaching and research. The interviews indicate the current fragility of morale and thus the need to do everything possible to strengthen it. In order to achieve this leadership qualities of the highest calibre will be required of administrators and senior academics. During the recent era of expansion morale was not an issue and academic leadership predominantly demanded the skills of the entrepreneur. Quite different skills and attitudes are now required if institutional vitality is not to be dangerously eroded.

2. Opinions about Colleagues - We were surprised at the number of negative opinions which were volunteered during the interviews. It was alleged that some staff members did no research, or were neglectful of teaching, or merited the description "deadwood", or were lazy and were "exploiting the system".

It is not easy to know how to interpret such comments. They could be indicative of a very high level of prefessional standards and an intolerance of any failure to maintain them. They could reflect the personality characteristics of many people who are attracted to academic work. There is some support for this view in the findings of Mitroff (1974) who interviewed 42 researchers involved in the Apollo space project.

> In going through the comments of the respondents with regard to their feelings toward one another, the extreme volatility of the comments is most striking. For sheer intensity of emotion, vituperation, and overall vindictiveness, none of the other areas under investigation even begin to approach the areas concerned with the scientists' feelings about one another. So many of the remarks and judgments contained profanity and bordered on slander (if they did not cross over into it) that it would be difficult just to count them.

The criticisms expressed by our respondents were couched in much milder terms but still reflect the low esteem in which some colleagues are held. Further evidence of such judgments on colleagues is provided by a national survey (Roe and Vasta, 1980) of assessment practices in Australian universities which canvassed the opinions of departmental heads and which found that:

> ... 21% of university heads of departments and 41% of college heads of departments referred critically to their colleagues in such terms as staff resistance, staff laziness, staff

inflexibility, staff lack of interest and/or knowledge of alternative assessment methods.

Another possible interpretation is that during the rapid expansion of the universities in the 1960s some staff were recruited whose commitment to teaching and research was to a considerable extent dependent on external incentives such as the rewards attendant upon promotion and mobility. As these become progressively more difficult to obtain these staff members may find it increasingly difficult to maintain a high level of interest in teaching and research and this decline in commitment may become visible to colleagues.

Whatever the explanation for the quite widespread criticisms made of colleagues the existence of this phenomenon indicates a potential for divisiveness which could be exploited by those who are unsympathetic towards the universities. During a period when the profession will need to present a confident and united front it must be a matter for concern that the basis for this is far from being flawless.

3. Views of the Institution - Newman saw a university as an Alma Mater, knowing her children one by one. A very different view of their university appears to be held by many of those whom we interviewed. The collective impression is of a socially fragmented, highly bureaucratised organization in which a small group of people make most of the decisions without usually communicating or consulting with anyone else. As one respondent said: "That's how it seems, whether it's true or not, but that's how it appears".

On the face of it, not a very congenial environment for those engaged in academic pursuits. Many of the comments are indicative of feelings of alienation, powerlessness and hostility, rather than a sense of the traditional academic community working collaboratively to achieve shared purposes. The frequent use of the terms "them" and "us" is very revealing and suggests a serious breakdown of communication and the development of an adversary relationship which is gradually displacing the collegial one. The national scale of this development has been commented upon by Walker (1980):

> That this contretemps has occurred is tragic... How could this have been allowed to happen? It should have been clear to university administrations that the accepted forms of governance,

> though slow and cumbersome, did provide a nearly ideal environment for reaching consensus on such issues as contract appointments, for example... yet somehow there was a failure of communication, a breakdown in participative government - and a reduction in the freedom of action of both sides is the likely result.

It could be argued that the idea of the university as a "community of scholars" has been on the wane for some time and has little application to most contemporary institutions whose size and bureaucratic procedures render any sense of community increasingly elusive. If that is so then most of our respondents seem to be saying that their working environment is becoming uncongenial and unresponsive to their needs as teachers and researchers.

CONCLUSIONS.

Perhaps the most striking feature of these interviews is what they reveal about the relationship between the perceived realities of university life and the preferred working environment of academics. Most people derived considerable satisfaction from teaching yet many indicated that they felt that this was undervalued by the institution. This is supported by the findings of a study of 796 academics by Genn (1980) which showed that 92% rated teaching performance as being ideally of high or extremely high importance yet only 12% thought it rated such importance in the actual academic world. Among our respondents many attached significance to social relationships and a sense of community but felt that their daily experience of these was less than optimal. There was a feeling that institutional arrangements largely failed to recognize their need to participate more fully in decision-making and policy formulation. The broader significance and worth of their scholarly and teaching activities were perceived as being increasingly undervalued by the community at large. Growing and competing demands on their time were seen to be making it increasingly difficult to give adequate attention to the various elements in their professional role.

Our findings suggest a widening gap between academic ideals and the realities of daily experience which is likely to lead to frustration and dissatisfaction which in turn will weaken morale. It was suggested earlier that morale is of vital importance to academic work because of the role which it plays in maintaining a high level of commitment to teaching and research. If it is significantly weakened then this will

have profound consequences for the work of the universities.

If recent events in Britain and North America provide any pointers then the Australian universities will face a difficult period in the near future. The role of the academic profession in overcoming these difficulties will be a crucial one and it is of the greatest importance that everything possible be done to enable the profession to respond effectively. Our findings indicate that there is a good deal of uncertainty, anxiety and frustration at the present time and a feeling that the academic life is losing some of its attractiveness. If allowed to go unchecked this could pose a threat to morale.

Much can be done from within the universities to correct this situation by supporting the idealism and commitment which is evident in many of the comments made by those we interviewed. There are strong indications of a willingness to respond to initiatives and institutional arrangements which are seen to be more closely aligned with academic values and aspirations. Those with administrative and academic leadership responsibilities, and the professional organizations, should be giving high priority to developing policies and creating a working environment which will help to give more substance to academic ideals.

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